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See also [IRC](#) (Internet Relay Chat) and [ICQ](#) (I Seek You).

It can be challenging to keep your e-mail messaging initiatives untangled.

Instant messaging (sometimes called IM or IMing) is the ability to easily see whether a chosen friend or co-worker is connected to the Internet and, if they are, to exchange messages with them. Instant messaging

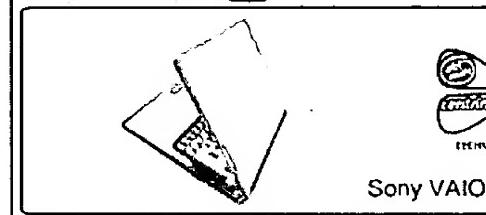
differs from ordinary e-mail in the immediacy of the message exchange and also makes a continued exchange simpler than sending e-mail back and forth. Most exchanges are text-only. However, some services, such as AOL, allow voice messaging and file sharing.

In order for IMing to work, both users (who must subscribe to the service) must be online at the same time, and the intended recipient must be willing to accept instant messages. (It is possible to set your software to reject messages.) An attempt to send an IM to someone who is not online, or who is not willing to accept IMs, will result in notification that the transmission cannot be completed. If the online software is set to accept IMs, it alerts the recipient with a distinctive sound, a window that indicates that an IM has arrived and allowing the recipient to accept or reject it, or a window containing the incoming message.

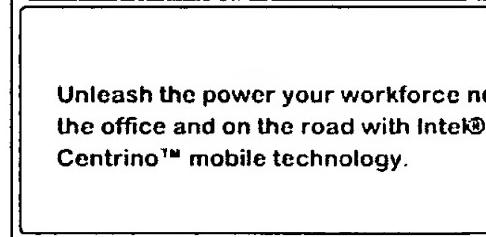
Under most conditions, IMing is truly "instant." Even during peak Internet usage periods, the delay is rarely more than a second or two. It is possible for two people to have a real-time online "conversation" by IMing each other back and forth.

Once in a while, a person might receive an IM from someone while already engaged in a chat with someone else, and decide to carry on

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IM chats with both people independently and concurrently. This requires mental alertness to avoid the embarrassment of sending one IM companion a message intended for the other.

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